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ABSTRACT

A study examined the message features that influence an innovation's acceptance by a mass audience. The study looked at three strategies of innovational rhetoric (denial of controversy, subtle criticism of existing institutions, and projection of a rhetorical vision) used by a commercial broadcasting company, called Whittle Communications in 1989, in an attempt to gain acceptance for the "Channel One" programming which Whittle was attempting to place into the New York State school system. Corporate discourse of Whittle Communications immediately prior to the June 1989 meeting of the New York State Board of Regents was examined to illuminate the use of innovative rhetoric as a response to a social institution's actions. Advertisements sponsored by Whittle Communications that appeared in "The New York Times" from June 7-15, 1989, were also analyzed. Results indicated that although the use of innovational strategies was not a total success for Whittle Communications, Whittle did, however, shape much of the public debate surrounding the issue of commercially sponsored news broadcasts in the nation's public schools, and says that it has persuaded 5,761 schools in 45 states to use Channel One. (Copies of the advertisements analysed and 63 references are attached.) (PRA)

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Whittle Communications and Channel One: Rhetorical Strategies of Innovation

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on three strategies of innovational rhetoric used by Whittle Communications in 1989. This rhetoric was used in an attempt to gain acceptance for Whittle's Channel One programming, which Whittle was attempting to place into the New York state school system. This paper's primary focus is on the message features that make an innovation accepted by a mass audience.

Whittle Communications and Channel One:

Rhetorical Strategies of Innovation

At its June, 1989, board meeting, the New York State Board of Regents met to discuss television programming proposed to be distributed to the students of school districts of New York. A state education department lawyer had issued a memorandum that suggested commercial broadcasts, specifically those of Whittle Communications and Channel One, in the schools could be considered illegal. Channel One is a program that is broadcast to many schools around the nation and has caused much controversy with the nation's educational community.

This controversy and the circumstances which surround it provide for a unique opportunity to study rhetorical strategies of innovation within a context of issue management. Specifically, I will focus on the use of three strategies of innovational rhetoric (1. denial of controversy, 2. subtle criticism of existing institutions, 3. projection of a rhetorical vision) as an issue management strategy. To examine the use of rhetorical strategies of innovation, I will examine the corporate discourse of Whittle Communications immediately prior to the June, 1989, meeting of the New York State Board of Regents to illumine the use of innovative rhetoric as a response to a social institution's actions. The texts I will analyze are advertisements sponsored by Whittle Communications that appeared between June 7th and June 15th, 1989, in The New York Times. To achieve

these purposes, I will center my research on the following questions. How did Whittle Communications use these three strategies of innovation to manage the issue? More generally, what message features make an innovation accepted by a mass audience? Before examining these advertisements within the context of issue management, some background about Whittle Communications and Channel One is necessary.

Background of Channel One

Channel One functions in the format of a satellite broadcasting service as a news service to schools. **The Educational Network** is Whittle Communications' umbrella term for all programming services offered. Along with Channel One, Whittle also offers The Classroom Channel, a video service that gives teachers access to supplementary video material for their lessons, and The Educators' Channel, a video service designed to inform educators about national trends in education. All three services are offered in one package, and Channel One has received the most opposition. The programming for Channel One is produced in New York City, New York and transmitted to schools around the nation before 6 a.m. Eastern Time to allow school personnel to review it. Closed circuit television programming is then shown on televisions mounted in each classroom in the school. Whittle Communications donates the closed circuit equipment to the school districts, after a three year period of showing the programming in the schools. It estimates the value of equipment to be donated to each school at about $50,000. Corporate sponsorship supports the network programming. Programming for the Channel One network runs twelve minutes with two minutes of commercials

interspersed within the programming. The commercials have been the most controversial aspect of the programming for Channel One. Educators around the nation have attacked Whittle and Channel One for the commercialization of the classroom (Hammer, 1990, p. 53). California, North Carolina, Louisiana, Rhode Island, Missouri, Alabama, and Massachusetts currently are considering or have considered measures that would prevent programming from the Channel One network from being shown in these states. The interaction of mass communication and education is growing more prevalent due to the shortages of teachers in school districts around the nation. The controversy that surrounds the Channel One network reflects this growing trend in the nation's educational system.

Channel One: The Focus Shifts

Channel One and its parent, Whittle Communications, originally had not seen their product, the actual programming to enter into the schools, as controversial. Channel One's promotional literature listed the "[e]nhancement of cultural literacy" (D. Jarrard, Undated) as one of the main goals of the program. In their corporate discourse, Whittle described America's students as "deficient in their knowledge of world culture compared with their peers in other nations" (D. Jarrard, Undated). Obviously, one of the key goals Whittle, in the promotion of Channel One, wanted to increase the knowledge American students had of the world around them. The establishment and the growth of Channel One and its programming also had the added benefit of letting Whittle Communications control an entirely new, untapped market

for advertising, junior and senior high students.

Those who opposed Channel One were able to reshape the public debate surrounding education into a debate attacking one of the basic features of the Channel One programming -- the advertising. The anti-Channel One forces defined a situation that had the local classroom being transformed into each parent's supermarket, only with 19-inch diagonal signs. Schools were drawn as "marketplaces for ideas, not commercial turf" (Berry & March, 1989, p. 35).

Whittle, then, lost control of the issue that Channel One and its programming were developed to solve. In a very important sense, Channel One became the key issue of the public debate it had been intending to solve. Within the context of issue management, what can be learned from Whittle's public discourse to show how those within the corporation attempted to manage the issue, Channel One?

Channel One: Innovation and Regaining Ground

I have previously stated that Whittle used innovation as a rhetorical strategy to manage Channel One. Cheney, Block, and Gordon (1986) define innovation as "an idea, practice or object perceived as new by the relevant unit of adoption" (p. 214). Smith and Windes (1975) describe three strategies of an innovational rhetoric. The first is **denial of controversy**. Rhetors who practice this **denial of controversy** "must demonstrate that the product of existing institutions is less, rather than more satisfying. Advocates must criticize institutions and point to areas of critical failure" (143-4). If a person, as an issue manager, criticizes an institution, he/she must also remember

that the institution must be persuaded to make the innovation that he/she, as issue manager of a corporation, proposes. If the rhetoric gets too harsh, the institution will be alienated and the proposed innovation will be rejected. **Denial of Controversy** is an important rhetorical aid in achieving this end and is directly linked to Smith and Windes' second rhetorical strategy.

The second strategy is the practicing of **subtle criticism of existing institutions**. Critics who practice this form of rhetoric must "emphasiz[e] that the proposed innovation is an addition to, **institutions** rather than a substitute for, institutional instruments ready at hand for meeting social needs" (Smith & Windes, 1975, p. 144). **Subtle criticism of existing institutions** is essential to the rhetoric of the innovator for many of the same reasons outlined earlier. The innovator, in practicing this **subtle criticism**, "must emphasize the weakness of traditional institutions and the strength of traditional values" (Smith & Windes, 1975, p. 144).

The third of the rhetorical strategies relates to the **projection of a rhetorical vision**.

> "In an innovational movements' vision, the **personae** are impersonal scenic elements which can be condemned for eroding society's values. These elements are mute, for no spokesman will arise to refute the condemnations. If significant audiences come to view their scene through the innovational movement's vision, the dramatic imperative of the movement is met" (Smith & Windes, 1975, p. 144).

In projecting a rhetorical vision, the innovator creates a fictional, faceless scapegoat. A faceless scapegoat is required because the innovator cannot directly attack the institution he or she is attempting to change. The innovator must position him- or herself in the debate with and within the institution. If the scapegoat does not exist in reality, then the transference inherent in the scapegoating process simply removes the 'guilt' from society (Brummett, 1981). Whittle scapegoats members of the educational institution who can not be named, those below the organizational level of the Board of Regents. Edelman (1988) writes "[t]he most potent and autocratic controls over individual lives are, in fact, exercised by low-level, low-status staff members whose anonymity protects them from criticism but also deprives them of public credit for praiseworthy performances" (p. 54). This insular quality makes the lower-level members of the educational institution a perfect group to scapegoat. People within society know that the scapegoat exists, but no one has the ability to name names. This attack on members of the educational institutions begins with Whittle Communications' first ad of June 7, 1989.

Channel One: Last Chance

On Wednesday, June 7, 1989, Whittle places their first advertisement in preparation for the controversy to come. This ad is a highly visual ad, with a simple drawing of a curving road going off into the sunset with an easily readable sign that says "LAST CHANCE TO CRITICIZE CHANNEL ONE." This ad follows the use of Smith and Windes' three innovational strategies of rhetoric.

Whittle addresses **denial of controversy** very clearly in the first section of the advertisement. "[E]ven critics of Channel One acknowledge the dire need for exactly such a program" ("Last Chance," 1989, p. A 28). Whittle attempts to address the concerns of its' critics by stating "[w]e obviously believe that a student news program without commercials is preferable to one with them" ("Last Chance," 1989, p. A 28). Whittle indirectly accuses the critics of Channel One of being unrealistic, in stating "we also believe that a student news program without commercial is preferable to no student news program at all" ("Last Chance," 1989, p. A 28).

Whittle **criticizes existing institutions** in this advertisement, namely those who oppose Channel One. The case the critics are arguing is seen as "becoming less and less convincing" ("Last Chance," 1989, p. A 28). Their arguments are seen as flying in the face of reason, what the voters want, and what parents want for their children. This effectively reduces the amount of people that the opponents of Channel One can claim as supporting their argument.

Whittle uses this advertisement to **project** what it sees as the value behind the programming of Channel One. Critics and opponents of the programming are accused of not knowing or caring about "how much teachers and students stand to gain by it. To us, though, its [Channel One] value has always been tied directly to that [how much teachers and students stand to gain]" ("Last Chance," 1989, p. A 28).

Whittle uses this advertisement to attack the critics of the services they intended for Channel One to provide to the schools around the nation. Whittle establishes that the company is not alone in its belief that a student news program is needed for the nation's children. Whittle promises significant additions to Channel One, giving critics "one last swipe at our program [Channel One]. After tomorrow it will be a lot harder to put up a roadblock" ("Last Chance," 1989, p. A 28). The roadblock would apparently be easier to place than Chris Whittle and his company imagined.

Channel One: The First Open Letter

Whittle Communications places the second advertisement was on Tuesday, June 13, 1989. In this advertisement, Whittle uses a classic example of Smith and Windes' (1975) innovational rhetoric. The first section of the advertisement follows Smith and Windes theme of **denial of controversy**.

Whittle establishes a controversy in the first sentence of the advertisement "An Open Letter," within the rhetorical environment. "I know you would agree that America's educational system is in crisis. Our high dropout rates, low test scores relative to those in other developed countries, and limited funds call for new measures " ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28). Edelman (1988) states that a "crisis heralds instability; it usually means that people must endure new forms of deprivation for a time... No characteristic of any episode makes it the precipitant of a crisis; it is apparently possible to elevate any incident to that role" (p. 31). Then Whittle's depiction of a crisis is a first step in the establishment of an innovational

rhetoric. It is necessary for Whittle to depict America's educational system as being in a crisis in order to persuade the New York State Board of Regents that they must endure "new forms of deprivation" (Edelman, 1988, p. 31) The deprivation in this case consists of the values of the Board of Regents.

Whittle then tries to place the Channel One debate into the best possible position for the company. Obviously, this is a major goal for any company's issue management strategy. To aid in the hoped for adoption of Channel One, Whittle depicted the potential adoption of all services offered as a "deci[sion that] will have far-reaching consequences for education in New York" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28).

Whittle describes the combination of services provided by Channel One's umbrella service, **The Educational Network**, as "technology that today's schools cannot begin to afford" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28). If schools "cannot begin to afford" this technology, then there is no controversy, or at least Whittle would like us to think so.

In the fifth paragraph of the advertisement Whittle makes the first direct reference to innovation . "Pioneering educators" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28) are pictured as applauding the promise of the program. Research and polls are cited to reinforce Whittle's corporate viewpoint of a beneficent steamroller -- a wonderful idea which has a small cost of only two minutes a day. An added benefit of the innovation the corporation is proposing is that "weary New York taxpayers" would not have to be asked to pay for the substantial improvements [of

technology in schools similar to Channel One] ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28).

The second section of the advertisement is the shortest section of the ad, two paragraphs. The section attacks the existing social institution, but not the Board of Regents. The advertisement attempts to separate the educational institution from the New York State Board of Regents. In the sixth paragraph, Whittle states "[s]ome educators abhor change" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28). This statement and others indicate Whittle's attempts to position the Board of Regents on their side of the debate. A rhetor does want to include his opposition on his/her side of the debate at times. If the rhetor is able to create an environment which includes his/her potential opposition, then, that environment is drastically changed in favor of the rhetor, making potential acceptance of that message easier. To isolate opponents of Channel One, Whittle quotes "one of them" as actually having "said `If this new program is allowed to succeed education would never be the same" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28). This section is where Whittle makes their most direct criticism of the educational institution. Their response to this quote is to say: "Who would want education to remain the same?" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28). By describing their opponents as "these critics," "they," and opposing "alternative solutions" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28) Whittle placed as much rhetorical distance as possible between the Board of Regents and the educational institution as a whole.

In the third section of the advertisement, Whittle exposes the "real motives" ("An Open Letter, 1989," p. A 28) of their

critics. "They [the critics] are more interested in maintaining their monopoly on the educational process. They want most to keep innovators away from their turf" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28). In this section, Whittle attacks the people who have the responsibility to set standards for the educational processes of the nation. In this **projection of a rhetorical vision**, Whittle conducts a full attack on the faceless scapegoat created in the second section.

The second sentence "[w]e believe they are not, at least in the case of **The Educational Network**, primarily concerned with the welfare of students" (An Open Letter, 1989, p. A 28) highlights the fact that Whittle considers their programming and ideas innovative. This sentence is one of the most interesting in the ad. It serves Whittle in two distinct ways. One way is it uses the looseness of the language in the sentence to attack educators for being territorial. This aids in the maintenance of the **rhetorical vision**. The second allows Whittle to suggest that the progress of innovation is being inhibited by the earlier mentioned critics. Whittle is claiming that, because it is innovative, it has a right to be allowed to place Channel One in the nation's schools. The faceless educators are depicted as not having sole right to control what happens in the schools. Education is too important to leave to the educators, in this view.

Later in the third section of the advertisement, Whittle compares the situation at the time of the ad with the situation the company previously experienced when dealing with educational authorities in the state of California. Whittle makes every

effort to appear reasonable, offering to provide a "thorough briefing about **The Educational Network**... at any time" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28). The advertisement presents the Board of Regents with many options, all of which are dictated by Whittle. Naturally, Whittle presents the possible decisions so as to best benefit the company.

Whittle presents the Board of Regents with four options. The first is to "elect to support a new idea in a field that sorely needs it" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28). This option presents Channel One and its sister programs as being the best possible choices and needed innovations. The second option is for the Board to "allow local school systems to weigh the benefits of **The Educational Network** for themselves" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28). This option, while not Whittle's favorite, would be a choice they could support with little harm to the Whittle corporate structure. This would happen if the Board of Regents chose to take no action on the Channel One matter.

The third choice Whittle presents was for the Board to "postpone action and gather more information on a project the details of which, after all, were announced just last week" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28). In some ways, this statement was contradictory, not only to statements mentioned earlier in the advertisement but to recent history surrounding Channel One as well. Whittle had announced the details of Channel One, including its method of financing six months earlier than the present date of this controversy. I am sure the programming idea had much longer than six months on the Whittle drawing board. Obvi-

ously, this programming idea progressed past its "infancy" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28).

The second apparent contradiction is in Whittle's use of the phrase "the details of which, were announced, just last week" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28). Whittle promotes the programming of Channel One, attacks its critics and then denigrates the object of all of this controversy? That does not make good sense. If an issue manager is attempting to promote a company product, he or she does not allow statements onto company advertisements which may cast doubts about the product being promoted.

In the final paragraph, Whittle concedes to the New York State Board of Regents that Channel One and **The Educational Network** are far from perfect. Channel One is presented to the Board and the readers of the ad as "being off to a good start" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28). Whittle makes a final reference to the fact that they consider themselves innovators. "It [Channel One] could also be a cornerstone for further innovation in the educational world -- and that is of utmost importance to future generations of students" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28). The Board is pictured in the advertisement as having a massive responsibility in regards to the students of the nation. Using innovational strategies of issue management, Whittle attempts to shape these responsibilities to favor Whittle Communications.

Channel One: The Second Open Letter

On Thursday, June 15, 1989, Whittle publishes their second open letter. The first open letter is portrayed as an

"address..." ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. D 32). The second letter has a much more desperate tone. Events of the previous week have not gone well for Whittle Communications. In the first letter, Whittle asks no direct questions of the Board of Regents other than "... what's the problem?" ("An Open Letter," 1989, p. A 28). In the second letter, the tone of the corporate discourse obviously shifts.

Chris Whittle is portrayed in this letter as "appealing to you, [the Board of Regents] a higher authority, for help" ("Another Open Letter," 1989, p. D 32), and the company asks six direct questions of the Board of Regents. The Board is asked to examine the accuracy of the information in its' internal analyses, the basic moral justifications for these analyses, and the use of obscure legalities versus actual student experience ("Another Open Letter," 1989).

In the space of two days, Whittle appears to have changed strategies of issue management considerably. In the first open letter, Whittle presented four options for action to the Board, ranging from total and complete acceptance of Channel One to a total and complete rejection of the same. In the second advertisement, Whittle states its preferred goal as simply "an opportunity to present our case, unscreened by staff opinions and uncolored by hyperbole, directly to you [the Board of Regents]" ("Another Open Letter," 1989, p. D 32).

Whittle continues to use each of the three strategies of innovation in the third advertisement. In the first paragraph of the advertisement is a section that involves the idea of **denial of controversy**. In this advertisement, as mentioned earlier,

Whittle is appealing to the Board of Regents as "a higher authority" ("Another Open Letter," 1989, p. D 32). The controversy surrounding Channel One is painted as being below the concern of the Board.

The second section of the advertisement starts with the second paragraph of the ad. Chris Whittle states "[i]n the light of yesterday's news reports regarding the department's understanding of **The Educational Network**, my concern has increased" ("Another Open Letter," 1989, p. D 32). Whittle then continues this criticism, arguing the information supplied to the New York State Department of Education and the Board of Regents is "mistaken" ("Another Open Letter," 1989, p. D 32). Those lower down in the Department are also accused of supplying the Regents with "far-fetched legal interpretations" ("Another Open Letter," 1989, p. D 32). Some people who oppose Channel One are seen as using these as attempt[s] to deter a project that they find threatening for other reasons ("Another Open Letter," 1989).

The third section of the advertisement, **projection of a rhetorical vision**, starts with the fourth paragraph. Whittle is extending the idea of a rhetorical vision beyond a simple attack on an unnamed, faceless, scapegoat. They ask for "The Educational Network [to] be judged primarily on the basis of what it brings to the experience of students" ("Another Open Letter," 1989, p. D 32). Whittle attacks "obscure legalities" ("Another Open Letter," 1989, p. D 32) that have stood in the way of the implementation of Channel One and its programming.

In the fifth paragraph, Whittle states that Channel One and

The Educational Network will continue on with or without the participation of the New York state educational institution. Whittle attempts to increase the pressure on the Board, saying that "[t]he greater misfortune would be suffered by the state's students and teachers, who would be deprived of this new national resource" ("Another Open Letter," 1989, p. D 32). This statement is another attempt to characterize Channel One and its programming as an innovative technique which no one, particularly any state's board of education, could stand in the way of its implementation.

The final section of the advertisement is a call for action from Whittle Communications to the New York State Board of Regents. In this section, Whittle takes a departure from the prior use of innovative rhetoric. In the sixth paragraph, Whittle shows events have taken a distinctly negative turn for the company. It abandons two of the possibilities it attempted to maneuver the Board of Regents into taking.

The first strategy dumped was the direct adoption of Channel One by the Board. The second strategy abandoned was for the board to allow individual school districts to make up their mind on Channel One. Whittle stated "[w]e do not seek an endorsement by the Board of Regents this week. We doubt that you would feel adequately prepared to take such a step" ("Another Open Letter," 1989, p. D 32). Still following the ideas of innovational rhetoric, Whittle then asks "do you feel sufficiently informed to condemn such a promising innovation?" ("Another Open Letter," 1989, p. D 32).

In this call for action, Whittle attempts to portray itself as a humble supplicant, who only asks for a fair hearing before an impartial judge. It implies that if the Board only had the `right' information, then the Board would "see the light" and decide in favor of Channel One. Also, Whittle Communications attempts to use an old maxim -- knowledge equals enlightenment -- to its benefit. "[O]ur experience tells us that the more one knows about **The Educational Network**, the more it is appreciated" ("Another Open Letter," 1989, p. D 32).

Whittle cites participating teachers, principals, adults who have seen the programming, national polls, and leading educators to show both the effectiveness of the program and to show that Whittle is willing to adapt and listen to suggested changes. The idea that the Board of Regents is not willing to change is implied, with Whittle getting in one last bit of **subtle criticism of existing institutions** - Isn't it fair for us to ask the same of you?" ("Another Open Letter," 1989, p. D 32).

Conclusion

"After tomorrow, it will be a lot harder to put up a roadblock" ("Last Chance," 1989, p A 28). That last sentence from the advertisement Whittle Communications presented on June 7th, 1989, proved to be prophetic because on June 16, 1989, The New York State Board of Regents "voted unanimously... to prohibit commercially sponsored television programs in the state's public schools, dealing a severe blow to the company [Whittle] that hopes to beam a daily news broadcast for teenagers into the nation's classrooms" (Verhover, 1989, p. A1).

Whittle, in their advertisements, promotes Channel One as an innovative technology which would bring knowledge of current events into the classroom. The process of education is seen as one which should be a partnership between the best the business community could offer, in this case Whittle, and the best teachers the school districts around the nation could offer.

Innovative rhetoric is a good source of rhetorical strategies for a group or corporation attempting to position an item or an issue within the public debate preceding adoption of that particular issue. If the corporation, Whittle, in this example, senses that it is again losing control of the issue, then it may be necessary for the corporation to again alter its rhetorical strategies as Whittle did in their second **Open Letter**. Whittle uses innovative rhetoric to fire one of the first shots attempting to redefine the uses of television within the nation's educational curriculum. Because of companies like Whittle Communications, and its major competitor for school news shows, Cable News Network, "students ... are learning to analyze television and the other media that pervade their lives" (Rothenberg, 1990, p. A 1).

Certainly, from the perspective of issue management, the use of innovational strategies of rhetoric was not a total success for Whittle Communications. The company did not get their programming accepted by the Board of Regents. Whittle, however, did shape much of the public debate surrounding the issue of commercially sponsored news broadcasts in the nation's public schools.

Whittle Communications says it has persuaded 5,761 schools in 45 states to show its programming in their classrooms (Rothenberg, 1990, p. A 1). The Cable News Network, as of February,

1990, claimed approximately 6,700 schools affiliated with its show, CNN Newsroom (Hammer, 1990, p. 52-53). News programming in the nation's schools is here to stay. The companies who provide this programming, in order to grow, will find the use of an innovational rhetoric a helpful aid in their issue management strategies.

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APPENDIX

Copies of Advertisements Analyzed

An open letter to the Members of the New York State Board of Regents:

I know you would agree that America's educational system is in crisis. Our high dropout rates, low test scores relative to those in other developed countries, and limited funds call for new measures.

This week you may be asked to consider just such a new idea—*The Educational Network*. What you decide will have far-reaching consequences for education in New York.

The Educational Network will bring the state an important new set of resources. *Channel One* will provide daily news programs designed for teenagers. *The Classroom Channel* will give teachers access to 1,000 hours of video material per year to supplement their instruction. *The Educators' Channel* will inform teachers and administrators about trends and events in their profession.

And *The Educational Network* is even more than these new channels. It is technology that today's schools cannot begin to afford. In New York State alone, it would provide thousands of satellite dishes, television sets, and sophisticated recording systems.

Pioneering educators in test cities have hailed the project's promise. Research indicates that it helps students learn. Polls show that 87% of parents want it in their teenagers' schools. And you do not have to ask weary New York taxpayers to foot the bill. Instead, two minutes of sponsor messages a day makes the entire system free to schools.

So what's the problem?

Some educators abhor change. While so many students are falling through the cracks in our educational system, these advocates of the status quo deny the staggering problems in American schools. On national television recently, one of them actually said, "If this new program is allowed to succeed, education will never be the same." Who would *want* education to remain the same?

These critics say schools should be free of sponsor messages, ignoring the fact that much educational material is already made available in exactly this fashion. They say companies that provide school services should not make profits, forgetting that textbook publishers are not philanthropists. But worst of all, these critics do not offer realistic alternative plans to bring these programs and technology to students. In our experience, the people who have been most vehemently opposed to *The Educational Network* have been the least interested in alternative solutions.

The weakness of their criticism unveils their real motives. We believe they are not, at least in the case of *The Educational Network*, primarily concerned with the welfare of students. They are more interested in maintaining their monopoly on the educational process. They want most to keep innovators away from their turf.

These critics have made and will continue to make efforts to persuade you to condemn *The Educational Network*. And, especially if you are provided with incomplete or biased information, they may succeed. This happened in California; sadly for students there, the state attempted to ban a program before its specifics had even been announced. If you would like a thorough briefing about *The Educational Network*, please advise us and we will provide it at any time.

This week the New York State Board of Regents has many options.

You could elect to support a new idea in a field that sorely needs it.

You could allow local school systems to weigh the benefits of *The Educational Network* for themselves.

You could postpone action and gather more information on a project the details of which, after all, were announced just last week.

Or you could condemn a program still in its infancy. We believe this course would be tragic and premature.

The Educational Network is far from perfect. What we have developed is in its early stages and, as such, is easy prey for detractors. But the evidence suggests that it is off to a good start. If successful, it would bring vast amounts of new technology and programming into the service of education. It could also be a cornerstone for further innovation in the educational world—and that is of utmost importance to future generations of students.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chris Whittle
Chairman, Whittle Communications

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Another open letter to the Members of the New York State Board of Regents:

On Tuesday, I addressed the members of the Board of Regents in an open letter published in this newspaper. I did so because I believe a project of great importance to the students of New York has not received a fair and complete hearing from the staff of the Education Department. I was appealing to you, a higher authority, for help. I am writing today to appeal to you again.

In the light of yesterday's news reports regarding the department's understanding of *The Educational Network*, my concern has increased. A department staff member is quoted as saying that *Channel One*, our daily news program for teenagers, would be mandatory viewing for students. That is completely incorrect. During a widely covered news conference in New York last week, we announced that this requirement had been dropped on the advice of educators across the country. If the department is mistaken concerning such a crucial and well-publicized item, how accurate is the rest of the information in its analysis?

Other reports yesterday showed that far-fetched legal interpretations were being offered to the Board of Regents as roadblocks to *The Educational Network*. One department lawyer said the project might be unconstitutional. Is it really plausible that a news program for teenagers violates the New York State Constitution? Or is this legal opinion simply an attempt to deter a project that some find threatening for other reasons?

And, more to the point, shouldn't *The Educational Network* be judged primarily on the basis of what it brings to the experience of students? Isn't that more important than obscure legalities?

Although we would regret a lack of participation on the part of New York State, *The Educational Network* will succeed. The greater misfortune would be suffered by the state's students and teachers, who would be deprived of this new national resource.

We do not seek an endorsement by the Board of Regents this week. We doubt that you would feel adequately prepared to take such a step. But do you feel sufficiently informed to condemn such a promising innovation?

What we want is an opportunity to present our case, unscreened by staff opinions and uncolored by hyperbole, directly to you. We would welcome your tough scrutiny. We would gladly agree to any form of public hearing.

We ask you to shine a bright light on what we have created. Not simply because we are proud of it, but because our experience tells us that the more one knows about *The Educational Network*, the more it is appreciated.

Each day during our five-week test of the project, support from participating teachers and principals grew. A national poll shows that adults favor the concept of our plan by nearly two to one; after they see actual programs, their approval rating soars to six to one. Leading educators who have watched closely as events unfolded are responding, too. Though stopping short of full support, they have acknowledged the progress we've made—and have noted how closely and how sincerely we have listened.

Isn't it fair for us to ask the same of you?

Thank you again for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chris Whittle

Chris Whittle
Chairman, Whittle Communications

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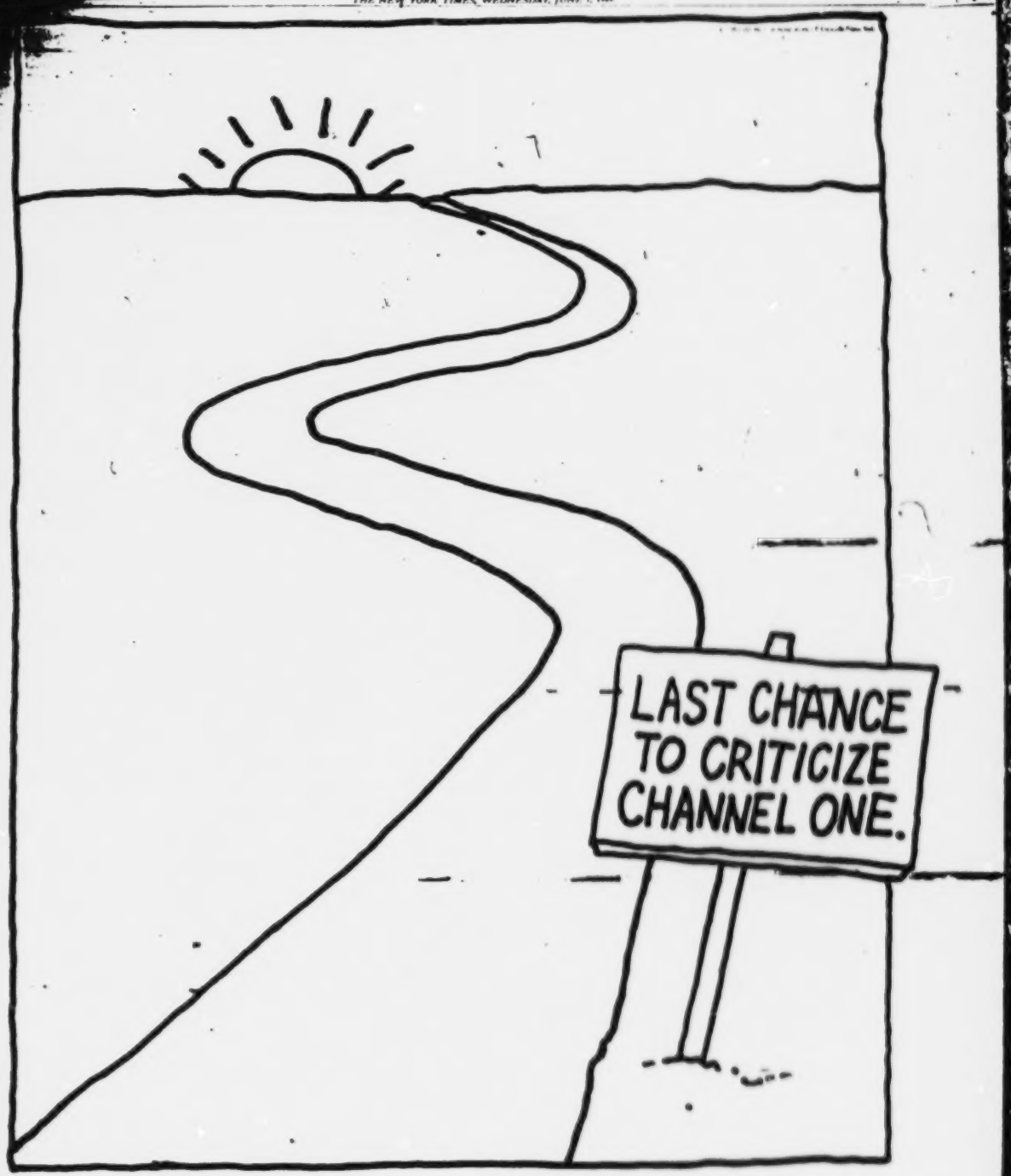

Three months ago we introduced Channel One, our news program for high school students.

Considering the fact that teenagers in this country have actually identified Jesse Jackson as a basketball player and Chernobyl as a disease, we thought it was a pretty good idea.

What they didn't foresee is the heated controversy that has developed over our plan to make it possible for us to produce Channel One and provide the hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of equipment that is absolutely necessary for schools to air it.

We obviously believe that a student news program without commercials is preferable to one with them.

But we also believe that a student news program with commercials is preferable to no student news program at all.

And as it turns out, we're not alone.

In a recent poll, an overwhelming majority of people who had viewed Channel One said they wanted it in their local schools.

In fact, an overwhelming majority of parents said they wanted it in their children's schools.

And [illegible]

But [illegible]

But [illegible] in the face of reason.

Opponents of Channel One have condemned this program without knowing, or apparently even caring, how much teachers and students stand to gain by it.

To us, though, its value has always been tied directly to that. Which is why we've conducted extensive research in the six pilot schools airing Channel One. And these results will be announced tomorrow.

Along with some significant additions to Channel One.

So now's the time for critics to take one last swipe at our program.

After tomorrow it will be a lot harder to put up a roadblock.

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